INTRODUCTION

This Briefing Paper accompanies the December 2006 staff note to the Kentucky Board of Education on Dropout Prevention and Persistence to Graduation. The Briefing Paper expands the discussion on each point included in the staff note and presents supporting data.

The December meeting is the first of multiple meetings that will address this topic. Essential questions to provide focus for the December Board discussion are:
- How extreme is the problem in Kentucky and what does it look like nationally?
- What has been and is being done from the state level to reduce the dropout rate?
- What strategies will be employed in the future?

How Extreme is the Problem in Kentucky and What Does it Look Like Nationally?

How Are Dropouts Defined?
According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) definition adopted by the Kentucky Board of Education, a dropout is an individual who:

> *1. Was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year (2005-2006);*
> *2. Was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year (2006-2007);*
> *3. Has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district-approved educational program such as a GED or certificate of completion/attainment pursuant to an individual education program (IEP); and,*
> *4. Does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: (a) transferred to another public school district, private school, or state or district-approved education program; (b) temporarily absent due to suspension; or (c) deceased.*

The Dropout Problem in Kentucky
According to the Kentucky Department of Education Office of Assessment and Accountability 1993-2005 briefing on nonacademic data:

Dropout – Grades 9 through 12
- The high school dropout rate slightly increased from 3.35 in 2004 to 3.49 in 2005.
- The male dropout rate continues to be greater than the female dropout rate.
- The male dropout rate slightly increased from 3.91 in 2004 to 4.09 in 2005.
- The female dropout rate slightly increased from 2.77 in 2004 to 2.87 in 2005.
- The African American and Hispanic dropout rates continue to be greater than the White dropout rate.
- The White dropout rate slightly decreased from 3.22 in 2004 to 3.21 in 2005.
- The African American dropout rate increased from 4.56 in 2004 to 5.92 in 2005.
- The Hispanic dropout rate increased from 4.77 in 2004 to 5.24 in 2005.

- Of the 99 districts for which African American dropout data is reported, in 31 the African American dropout rate is higher than that among White students. In 68 districts, the African American dropout rate is less than the dropout rate among their White counterparts.
- Of the 31 with higher incidence of drop out among African American students, 14 have variance rates less than 2.0; 12 have variance rates between 2.0 and 5.0; and 5 have rates between 5.08 and 17.69. (Variance rate equals African American dropout rate minus White dropout rate.)

Examples of the dropout data from several Kentucky districts are included as Appendix A District Data. Examination of these data tells us that the **dropout and graduation rates differ substantially from district to district**. Although examination of all districts will yield patterns at the state level, especially related to ethnicity and socioeconomic status, actual outcomes for students are impacted by the local context and culture of the school and community.

Data Collection and Reporting in Kentucky
Prior to the 05-06 reporting cycle, data was not reported in a way that produced comparable nonacademic data indicators for the groups that the Board has identified, but most of that data will be available going forward. For instance, the 2005-06 nonacademic data will be reportable "with/without disability" and "with/without LEP" for the first time this year and will be presented at the February meeting.

As an example, what we know today about the incidence of dropout among s**tudents with disabilities** comes from the December 1 Report of Children and Youth with Disabilities Receiving Special Education and Related Services, along with other data captured at that time as required under the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Districts submit these reports annually and "dropout" is captured as one reason for exiting. These data show a *declining trend* in the dropout rate for students with disabilities from 8.5% in 2000-01 to 5% in 2005-06. (See Appendix B) It is important to note that the exiting report data does not necessarily compare to the nonacademic dropout data. The Nonacademic Data Report Guidelines allow for students to return by October 1 and not be counted as dropouts for accountability purposes. The exiting data looks only at the period of July 1 through June 30. The different submission dates of the data make it dissimilar, as well as the fact that each uses a different definition of "dropout."

Data about the dropout rate among the **homeless** is the most difficult to secure because the population is so transient and not every district has a program for the homeless. It is the category in which we are least likely to have valid, reliable data as we examine this issue.

National Comparisons For Identified Groups
Dropout rate and graduation rate are closely connected. Both are pertinent to a discussion about why students leave the education system, but they are sometimes confused. An explanation of how each is calculated in Kentucky is included as Appendix C Definitions. Kentucky does not report graduation rate at the state level for subpopulations. However, based on the United States Department of Education Common Core of Data, Kentucky's graduation rates (2002 – 03 data) were as follows, in comparison to national data.

Graduation Rates	All Students	Male	Female	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Black	White
Kentucky	69.7	65	73.5	--	79.5	63.7	54.1	70.7
All States	69.6	65.2	72.7	47.4	77	55.6	51.6	76.2

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, "Dropouts are about three times as likely as high school completers who do not go on to college to be welfare recipients, and about 30 percent of federal and 40 percent of state prison inmates are high school dropouts, thus imposing a considerable cost on all levels of government." [i]

Who is Dropping Out in Kentucky and Why?
When a student drops out of school in Kentucky, a dropout questionnaire is administered at the local level. The following **characteristics of Kentucky dropouts** surveyed via the Dropout Questionnaire (2005 Data) tell us a bit more about who these students are. This data should be considered self-reported:

In Kentucky:
- 70 percent had parents with a high school education
- 22 percent had parents with less than a high school education
- 45 percent were 18 years of age
- 38 percent were 17 years of age
- 17 percent were 16 years of age
- 65 percent were in alternative placements
- 38 percent did not receive counseling
- 95 percent were not involved in extracurricular activities
- 77 percent had never been suspended
- 84 percent did not receive remediation in the last three years
- 55 percent dropped out with two years or less to complete high school

In Kentucky, the students identified the following as major factors for leaving school (2006 Data):
- 48%   Failing
- 21%   Boredom
- 10%   Employment

- 6%   Illness
- 6%   Student/Teacher Conflict

Who is Dropping Out Nationally and Why?
For comparison, information from two recent national studies provides additional insight into why students are leaving school. The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts[ii] attempts to capture the student perspective on the dropout issue. The findings are based upon surveys and focus groups of young people, age 16 – 25, who identified themselves as high school dropouts in twenty-five communities in the U.S. The focus of the research was to solicit student feedback on the issue of who the dropouts are, why they dropped out, and what might have helped them stay in school.

Results of this **national survey of dropouts** said:

- 88 percent had passing grades, with 62 percent having "Cs and above"
- 58 percent dropped out with just two years or less to complete high school
- 66 percent would have worked harder if expectations were higher
- 70 percent were confident they could have graduated from high school
- 81 percent recognized that graduating from high school was vital to their success
- 74 percent would have stayed in school if they had to do it over again

Students participating in the **national survey** identified these as the major factors for leaving school:
- 47%   Classes were not interesting
- 43%   Missed too many days and could not catch up
- 42%   Spent time with people who were not interested in school
- 38%   Had too much freedom and not enough rules in my life
- 35%   Was failing in school

In addition, students in the **national survey** provided feedback on what they believed would have improved their chances of staying in school:
- 81%   Opportunities for real-world learning to make classroom more relevant
- 81%   Better teachers who keep classes interesting
- 75%   Smaller classes with more individualized instruction
- 71%   Better communication between parents & school
- 71%   Parents who insist that kids go to school every day
- 70%   Increased supervision at school; ensure students attend classes

In comparing the response of Kentucky students to that of the students surveyed in Silent Epidemic, it may be important to note the timing of the feedback. While Kentucky students indicate "failure" as a top reason for leaving as they are exiting, that may be simply a symptom of the more specific factors identified by students in the national survey who were asked about dropping out after they had exited the system.

The Gifted Dropout

Although most of the conversation about dropouts focuses on disadvantaged youth, the school systems lose many gifted students as well. The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRCGT) at the University of Connecticut has conducted longitudinal studies to obtain information about gifted high school dropouts. They estimate the **dropout rate among the gifted at 5%.** The results from those studies indicate that:

- Many gifted students left school because they were failing school, didn't like school, got a job, or were pregnant, although there are many other related reasons.
- Most parents whose gifted child dropped out of school were not actively involved in their child's decision to drop out of school.
- Many gifted students who dropped out of school participated less in extracurricular activities.
- Few gifted students who dropped out of school had plans to return to school.
- Gifted students who dropped out of school had higher self-concepts than non-gifted students who dropped out of school.
- Many gifted students who dropped out of school were from low socio-economic status (SES) families and racial minority groups.
- Some gifted students who dropped out of school had parents with low levels of education.
- Gifted students who dropped out of school had used marijuana more than gifted students who completed school.
- Dropout behavior for gifted students was significantly related to students' educational aspirations, pregnancy or child-rearing, gender, father's highest level of education, and mother's highest level of education. [iii]

We do not know what the situation is today in Kentucky with regard to giftedness and dropout. However, with the new ability to track individual students and the planned integration of the Gifted and Talented Services Plans into the Individual Learning Plan (ILP), that situation will change.

It is important to note another observation from the NRCGT. Their research indicates that dropouts among the gifted tend to fall into two broad categories:

- Those who are recognized as gifted but are not provided appropriate services and may drop out to pursue more challenging, higher levels of learning in another sector; and,
- Those who are not recognized as gifted and dropout out of or are pushed out of the system because of boredom and frustration which may manifest as behavorial issues. The risk is particulary high for the gifted who are minorities and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

What Has Been Done and Is Being Done to Reduce the Dropout Rate

Kentucky Dropout Prevention Grant Program
The Kentucky General Assembly began appropriating **specific funds for dropout prevention grants** beginning in the mid-1980s. Leadership in the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) at that time felt the best strategy for the grants was to provide as many as possible to the districts with the highest dropout rates. Consequently, each district receiving a grant got approximately $2,000 to $4,000 each. In the late 1980s, KDE decided to provide hands-on assistance to ten school districts: the five districts with the highest dropout rates and the five districts with the lowest attendance rates. A KDE consultant was assigned to each district for one school semester and spent significant time on-site to address the dropout or attendance issues. The goal for the districts with high dropout rates was to reduce the rates under 5%. The goal for the districts with low attendance rates was to increase the rates over 94%. Nine of ten districts met their goals, with the exception of Floyd County.

KDE has continued to award dropout grants to districts with high dropout rates. KRS 158.146 requires KDE to award grants to districts with an *overall dropout average exceeding 5% over a three-year period*. Furthermore, 75% of the awarded dropout grants are required to be directed to services for at-risk elementary and middle school students. The remaining 25% of funds can provide services for high school students. These criteria are limiting the Department's ability to apply funds strategically.

The amount of the grants has varied during the years, including an effort to distribute the funding to as many districts as possible (e.g., $2,000 - $4,000 per grant). KDE has also awarded larger grant amounts (e.g., up to $90,000/per district) with the thinking that districts can address the dropout problem more comprehensively with a greater amount of grant funds. Despite the difference in grant funding, the **overall results of the dropout grants have been inconclusive**. In a review of dropout data over the last few years, there has been some improvement in some districts while others have not improved. Also, some districts improve temporarily and then their rates become elevated again. Smaller school districts seem to have the best results at keeping students in school, but they also have an inherent weakness in that it only takes one or two dropouts to significantly elevate their dropout rates. A summary of 2003 and 2006 grant cycles is attached as Appendix D.

Comprehensive Dropout Prevention Plan
In December 2000, the Kentucky Board of Education adopted a Comprehensive Dropout Prevention Strategy, which had the following components:
- A cross/agency team that developed strategies to reduce the dropout rate and coordinated the work across the agency;

- A year long effort to engage parents in an effort to promote children's reading success with the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development and other stakeholder groups;
- A Toolkit that includes best practices for schools, which may be viewed on the KDE website at http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/dropout-prevention/
- Engagement of community and business partners in efforts to link students at risk of dropout with employment opportunities
- Collaboration with the Center for School Safety on conflict resolution models.

The Partnership for Minority Student Achievement
The Minority Student Achievement Task Force (MSATF) was formed in March 2000 with a charge to: (a) review and analyze existing data about the performance of Kentucky students, with particular emphasis on achievement gaps between majority and minority students; (b) investigate promising research and practices from Kentucky and the nation; and (c) develop a set of actions, with timelines, for improving the performance of minority students in Kentucky. Out of the work of the Task Force, a report was generated in October of 2000 that outlined a set of recommendations for use by local school districts in reducing the minority student achievement gap. One component of the report provided demographic data on student performance revealing that approximately 70% of African American students are located in five of the 176 school districts in the state. This information provided the Task Force with a subset of school districts (known as partnership sites) on which to focus for initial implementation of the group's recommendations. The partnership sites were: Owensboro Independent; Paducah Independent; Bardstown Independent; Hardin County; Fayette County; Jefferson County; and Christian County.

The Task Force produced what is now known as the "All means All" Call to Action document, October 2000. This document identified 10 goals for raising achievement, a barriers document and a planning tool to reduce barriers and meet the identified goals. Each district identified specific schools to carry out the charge issued by the Task Force and implemented by KDE. KDE was responsible for taking the lessons learned and expanding these proven strategies across the state through the Closing the Achievement Gap initiative.

Closing the Achievement Gap/ Instructional Equity
The Department has an ongoing initiative in place to close the achievement gap. Those overarching strategies include promising practice models, technical assistance, and other resources for districts and communities. (http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Closing+the+Gap/default.htm) A more recently added component of the initiative is the Achievement Gap Coordinators (AGCs). The AGCs provide local leadership with support and assistance to boost student achievement. They are resources for districts who are looking for effective strategies to reduce the dropout rate. Each of the five coordinators targets a specific area of the state.

What Strategies Will be Employed in the Future?

Longitudinal Student Tracking
Clearly, implementation of longitudinal tracking at the individual student level through the Kentucky Instructional Data System (KIDS) will increase the Department's ability to collect and analyze data about who is dropping out, why and what factors were present in the student's experience that might have placed them at higher risk. There are models in other states and localities to inform the work here in Kentucky. A recent study, Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System - A Dual Agenda of High Standards and High Graduation Rates, [iv] identifies factors that put students at greater risk of dropping out and proposes implementation of early warning systems based on longitudinal research at the school and district level. (See Appendix E) Data are examined related to:

- Students' social background;
- Students' educational experiences; and,
- School characteristics.

The authors identify risk factors that significantly increased the odds of dropping out in the districts that they studied. It is important to note that risk factors were not consistent from district to district, although they were similar. Examples of those risk factors are:

- Receiving more than one grade of F in core academic courses or not earning enough credits to be promoted during 9th grade
- Failing one or more courses during 8th grade
- Entering 9th grade with math or reading scores below 8th grade level
- Being retained in 9th grade
- Significant drop in grade point average from 8th to 9th grade
- Receiving a failing classroom behavior mark during 6th grade
- Low attendance during 8th grade
- Low attendance during the first 30 days of 9th grade
- Significant drop in attendance beginning in 6th grade and worsening in subsequent years

The authors also found that combinations of factors (low attendance, male gender, and failing grade) may be more predictive than any single indicator. Similarly, changes in student patterns can be significant and can only be observed through longitudinal tracking.

<u>The Secondary Agenda</u>
The Kentucky Board of Education has adopted an overarching goal to guide the work of middle and high school redesign:

> *Goal: By 2014, every Kentucky student will persist to high school graduation and transition to success in learning, work and citizenship supported by high quality, real-world learning, a culture of high expectations, and a plan of intentional focus.*

The national studies referenced earlier and feedback from Kentucky students tell us that **dropping out is a long process, not a single event**. It also tells us that the schooling these students are experiencing would not be categorized as ". . .high quality, real-world learning, a culture of high expectations, and a plan of intentional focus." The studies tell us that most dropouts:

- Experience school as boring and not related to the real world
- Experience uninspired teaching and are unmotivated
- Experience real life events that get in the way of school
- Struggle in school and need more help (academically and/or socially)
- Experience a slow process of disengagement (attendance patterns are key)
- Experience too much freedom and lack of attention from adults
- See their parents engaged in discussions about their progress too little and/or too late

The Secondary Agenda that the Board has adopted **places students at the center of a system of supports** as evidenced by the five essential principles, which must be present and sustained for every student in every school:
- Students are actively engaged in a **challenging curriculum** that stretches his/her learning and is based on Individual Learning Plan.
- Educators collaborate in professional learning communities that **increase capacity to provide high quality, engaging learning** experiences for every student.
- Curriculum, instruction and assessment are **comprehensive, standards-based** and include both traditional and non-traditional opportunities.
- Schools create a **culture of excellence and provide individualized supports** so that every student experiences success.
- **Leadership organizes** and reorganizes resources **in response to student needs** on a continuing basis**.**

Implementation of these principles is critical if more students are to persist to graduation prepared to be successful at a next level of learning and work. Accountability for implementation will be aided by the recent adjustments to the accountability index.

Effective implementation of Individual Learning Plans can mitigate many of the factors that are placing students at risk of dropping out, which accumulate over time and decrease the chance of graduation:

- Targeted, focused advising will foster meaningful relationships between students, teachers and the course of study that will lead to increased involvement and achievement.
- Teachers and instructional leaders will be able to manage groups and subgroups of students, allowing educators to plan based on data about academic needs.
- A web-enabled tool will follow students from school to school (especially beneficial for transient students) and allow greater communication between schools related to student performance and goals.
- ILP will provide information about student achievement and performance that can help identify needs for professional development related to factors that are placing students at risk.
- ILP is an important way for parents and adult advocates in the community to engage with the school, encouraging parental involvement for those students and families who might otherwise feel disenfranchised.
- Data from the ILP will provide a broader information base to expand relevant learning options for these students, including planning with the community for learning experiences that connect students to colleges and potential employers.
- The advising function and data from ILP will help teachers meet both the academic and personal learning needs of individual students.
- ILP is available in Spanish language to meet the needs of those students and parents.

Should Kentucky decide to pursue the development of **"On Track Indicators"** to provide an early warning system for dropouts, those indicators could be embedded and tracked within the ILP.

Equitable access to high-quality advising is a critical success factor for students at risk of dropping out. The Department will be working with districts and schools to transform traditional school-by-school, one to many students counseling models to more systemic approaches that engage many more adults in advising relationships with students over much longer periods of time. **A more systemic approach includes matching advising talent with student need, to ensure that those with the highest level of need do not receive the lowest levels of support and attention.** The ILP, itself, contains an administrative query and reporting capability that will help administrators monitor the advising processes for the most at risk students.

According to the Education Trust, there is **no single strategy** that will create great gains in narrowing the achievement gap and keeping our most at risk students in school and on a path to success. The Education Trust, *Dispelling the Myth* program honors high-performing and gap-closing schools from around the nation that serve large populations of low-income students or students of color. Schools are recognized for making significant strides in narrowing gaps in academic achievement among students, posting achievement that significantly exceeds state averages, or improving student performance at a rapid pace. The Education Trust says:

"While there is no single "silver bullet" strategy employed by all successful schools, several common themes emerge from the practices of the schools receiving the 2006 Dispelling the Myth awards. Among them: having high expectations for all students; analyzing student data to track progress; identifying individual student needs and improving instruction; providing a rich curriculum that is aligned to state standards; and using purposeful professional development to improve teachers' skills."

The dropout rate of students of poverty and minority students is unacceptable and must change. Fortunately, there is a foundational principle on which schools can rely in making this happen while also increasing the achievement of these students.

This foundational principle is **equity**. Equity means providing each and every student with the individualized support he or she needs to reach or exceed a common standard and to be successful in school. As schools institutionalize equity, they will decrease dropouts and close their achievement gaps. Equity is implemented through a comprehensive and systemic approach to leadership, school culture, and teaching and learning. KDE will share more about this at the KBE's February meeting where schools will present specific practices.

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[i] Alliance for Excellent Education, Issue Brief, "Demography as Destiny," October 2006.

[ii] A report by Civic Enterprises in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. By: John M. Bridgeland, John J. DiIulio, Jr. and Karen Burke Morison. March 2006.

[iii] Renzulli, J. S., & Park, S. (2002). *Giftedness and high school dropouts: Personal, family, and school-related factors* (RM02168). Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.

[iv] A white paper prepared for "Staying the Course: High Standards and Improved Graduation Rates," a joint project of Achieve and Jobs for the Future, funded by the Carnegie Corp. of New York. June 2006.